

Reckless Writing: A Case Study

The sample of learner language (see Appendix 1) discussed in this paper has been selected from the 15000-word corpus of texts analysed in the study of written English produced by Polish EFL learners applying for entry to the English Department of the Jagiellonian University in July 2001. The study focused on the least successful candidates, who obtained the lowest scores in the entrance examination. It was inspired by the striking disparity between the candidates' skills and the demands of the task in general, and specifically by the striking discrepancies between various features of the texts which they produced. In the same text several indicators of advanced language skills, such as syntactic complexity or lexical sophistication, contrasted with both the number of errors and their gravity.

Since the learners' texts were summaries of a Polish text, it was possible to reconstruct even very serious errors or chunks of language with very high error density by referring to the Polish text, which made error analysis feasible. The text selected for the case study ranked second for error density in the group of 30 texts, while at the same its length and elements of advanced lexis as well as an attempt at a complex grammatical structure indicated advanced language skills.

Identification of Errors

The errors in the text were identified and counted by three NS judges and one NNS (Polish) judge. Bearing in mind the effects of various character-

istics of judges (e.g. age, professional background) on their evaluation of errors, I selected four judges that have several common features: they are all academics, teaching and doing research in humanities (two in American Literature, two in Linguistics) with at least 10-year experience, and none of them had access to the original text, which the candidates were to summarize. The significant features which distinguish them are their L1s (three judges were native speakers: two American, one English, while one judge was Polish) and the teaching experience (only the Polish judge has the experience of teaching English to Polish learners). Of course, as all texts in the study, this text was also analysed by myself, and while I shared the two features of all judges (academic teaching, research in humanities) as well as two features of the Polish judge (Polish as L1, experience of teaching English to Polish learners), I had access to the original Polish text, which in the attempt to reconstruct its poorly written summary was a considerable asset.

The text was also submitted to a group of non-expert NS judges (seven American undergraduates), but their results were substantially different and will be discussed later; however, some references to their reconstruction of selected errors will be made in the following analysis.

The error analysis in this case study is based on the guidelines for the procedure presented by Carl James in *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis* (1998). Out of the four criteria for error identification distinguished by James, i.e. grammaticality, acceptability, correctness and strangeness and infelicity (1998: 64–5), the measure of deviance used in this study is that of grammaticality. On the one hand, James himself admits that EA is primarily concerned with the category of ungrammaticality and unacceptability (1998: 69); on the other, it has to be remembered that the purpose of this study was to trace indicators of advanced language in the poor writers' texts, so the learners were credited wherever possible rather than blamed for awkwardness or infelicity. Text 1 provides an interesting example of how the choice between the criteria of grammaticality and acceptability affects the evaluation of a sentence. Out of the 24 sentences in text 1, there are only two sentences that can be judged as grammatical, but they are not necessarily acceptable:

13. *They are moody.*

16. *They are lost.*

Both of them are very short and simple, relying on the same structure, but at the same time grammatically accurate. The interesting thing is that firstly, the judges were to use only the criterion of grammaticality, and secondly, such two error-free sequences should be particularly appreciated in the text with 110 errors. Still, two judges found them unacceptable and offered the following reconstruction:

13. *They experience depression.*

16. *They feel lost in the world.*

When the original text is consulted, sentence 13 may even contain a lexical error. The adjective *moody* is not only unacceptable within the context of the English summary; there is no indication of such a characteristic in the Polish text. If any characteristic may be traced as a possible source of the lexical error, it is probably the adjective *znerwicowane* (*nervous*). It fits the children described in the text much more than *moody*, especially that the latter is quite pejorative and unlikely to evoke sympathy, which is likely to be evoked by the text as a whole.

Description and Classification of Errors

In order to classify errors James proposes the following distinction between the three levels of the language: substance (spelling / pronunciation), text (lexis, grammar) and discourse (cohesion, coherence, genre-fidelity, felicity). The level of discourse is not part of error analysis in my study, since from the perspective of writing assessment the issues understood as discourse belong to the area of content and organisation. The other levels correspond to the three categories of errors which I used: spelling, grammatical and lexical errors. Each of the three types can be further divided according to what James calls the Target Modification Taxonomy, i.e. the ways in which learners “modify” target forms: omission, addition, misselection (or misformation), misordering, blends. The same errors within the three types (spelling, grammar, lexis) are also grouped according to different criteria. For example, lexical errors are divided into formal and semantic errors. Grammatical errors are divided

according to rank (clause-phrase-word-morpheme) or class (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, etc.).

The following presentation of results will focus on the categories of errors which are particularly visible in this case study. Some words may appear under more than one category if they have different errors (e.g. **becourse*). Still, in the overall error count one word incorrectly spelled was always counted as one error. The number following the error is the number of the sentence in which it appears. All errors classified into categories are presented in the profile of errors in Appendix 2.

Grammar

The analysis of the grammatical errors in text 1 indicates the writer's confusion of singular and plural forms. Altogether there are 21 errors (tokens) in this category. There are 11 errors of putting the indefinite article before a plural noun, an error of using a singular pronoun with a plural noun (**another children*) and a singular pronoun (**onself*) instead of a plural pronoun (*themselves*); there are 5 nouns used in the singular form without an article, which may be interpreted as singular or plural, and three verbs used in the singular instead of the plural form. Even the lexical error in sentence 20 (**a change* for *different* or *changed*), apart from being the wrong word class (a noun instead of an adjective or a verb), also contains the indefinite article, as if emphasizing the singular form. The strong indicators of singular forms (the indefinite article and 3rd person singular suffix) gave rise to numerous errors particularly because the text itself is about children in the plural and out of the 24 sentences there are only 5 where the subject is not *children* or *they* (2, 3, 10, 21, 23) and still in two of these the subject is plural: *parents* (3), *organizations* (23) so there are only 3 sentences with singular subjects (2, 10, 21). The plural noun *children* is repeated 12 times, the plural pronoun *their* is repeated 6 times, while *they* is repeated as many as 21 times.

On the other hand, there is an indicator of syntactic complexity. Sentence 20 (**If they hadn't a problems on shoools they would have been a change*) contains a very advanced structure, i.e. a mixed conditional (2nd and 3rd), which in the first place may be surprising considering the syntactic simplicity and the number of errors in the text but, what is also interesting, this sentence has been reconstructed by the four judges as

different conditionals. One of them (American NS) used the third conditional (*If they hadn't problems in school, they might have been able to change.*) Taking the original text into account (which that judge could not do), one may claim that such a speculation about the past of the children in question is not appropriate. The text describes their situation now (they currently have problems at school) so the speculation refers to the present and in that case the accurate choice is the second conditional at least for this part of the sentence. The other three judges offered the following reconstructions:

- 1) 2nd conditional: *If they did not have problems at school, they would be different.* (NNS)
- 2) 2nd conditional: *If they didn't have problems at school, they would change.* (American NS)
- 3) mixed (2nd + 3rd): *If they hadn't problems at school, they would have changed.* (English NS).

Despite different conditionals, reconstructions 1 and 3 convey very similar meaning only because the lexical error **a change* has been differently interpreted: the children would have changed so they would be different now. Since the choice of the conditional here depends on the interpretation of the lexical error and one of the judges retained the original structure (mixed conditional), the choice of the conditional was not identified as a grammatical error of misselection.

Lexis

From the perspective of the Target Modification Taxonomy, lexical errors are typically errors of misselection. They result from the wrong choice of lexical items, which are either formally or semantically inappropriate.

Formal Errors. There are five errors of misselection of derivational suffixes. In three cases (2 types) adverbs are used instead of adjectives and in each the adverb derivational suffix *-ly* is used: **originally* (4) and **rustically* (8, 21). The word *rustically* is also a semantic collocational error: the writer used it to describe *children* (8) and *schools* (21). All judges refused to accept the collocation *rustic schools* and reconstructed it as *rural* or

country schools; however, what is interesting, two judges (American NS, literature specialists) accepted the collocation *rustic children*.

The two errors of misusing the noun derivational suffix *-tion* are similar only on the surface. Using **tendention* (21) instead of *tendency*, the writer selected one of the productive noun derivational suffixes but simply made the wrong choice. However, the error in the word **aclimation* (22) is more complex. If the distorted word is reconstructed as *acclimatization*, it is a formal error of using a noun instead of a verb after a modal verb (**they couldn't aclimation* for *they can't acclimatize*), so it is not just the wrong choice of one of the productive suffixes within the same word class but the wrong choice of the word class.

The lexical error **a change* in sentence 20, which has been discussed above, is difficult to classify. If it is reconstructed as *changed*, then it is a formal error; if it is interpreted as *different*, then it becomes a semantic error.

The error in the word **alcohols* (11) appears in the phrase **parents drinking too much alcohols*, with the quantifier *much* indicating an uncountable singular noun. It has been classified as a formal lexical error of misselection (*alcohols* being a possible form though extremely rare and contextually restricted). Considering the number and gravity of errors in the text, it is impossible to determine whether the quantifier was the writer's conscious choice. What may suggest that it was, however, is the fact that the quantifier *many* is used correctly with plural countable nouns twice: **many childrens* (10) and **many people* (19). It may be seen as another example of the writer's confusion of plural and singular forms, the tendency identified in the grammatical errors.

There are three words which have been classified as non-existent: **tendention* (21), **aclimation* (22) and **stereopetite* (24). Although the first two have already been discussed, it has to be mentioned that apart from the syntactically inadequate suffix, the word **aclimation* has yet another error. Both **aclimation* and **stereopetite* should be seen as distortions, which in James's taxonomy are intralingual errors of form. It is noticeable that both of these bizarre distortions are not interlingual errors. As a matter of fact, if the words had been affected by transfer from Polish, it would have been positive transfer. The Polish equivalents of the distorted words are very similar to the target forms: *aklimatyzacja* – *acclimatization*, *stereotyp* – *stereotype*.

Error	Target phrase affected by misordering	L1 word or phrase affected by misinformation (calque)
* <i>many childrens family</i> (10)	<i>family with many children</i>	<i>wielodzietna</i>
* <i>their life way</i> (15)	<i>their way in life</i>	<i>droga życiowa</i>
* <i>it same</i> (24)	<i>in the same way</i>	<i>tak samo</i>

Table 1. Lexical errors classified as misordering or misinformation.

The remaining four errors cannot be easily classified. The single word **childrenhouses* (11) for *children's homes* is not only a formal error of misordering but also a semantic error of misselection (*houses* for *homes*). There are 3 errors which can be classified as a misordering of the target phrase or as an interlingual misinformation error, specifically a calque (Table 1).

Semantic Errors. To focus on the semantic errors, in the following discussion the spelling of the words has been corrected.

There are two collocational errors: **have place* for *take place* (14) and **end school* for *finish school* (9). The first one is a common transfer error among Polish learners: the Polish collocation is *mieć miejsce*. The latter, however, is interesting because it is one of the 4 phrases that none of the NS judges managed to understand, although the sense relation between *end* and *finish* is that of synonymy and, despite their collocational restrictions, there are contexts in which these two words are interchangeable. The reconstructions were: *go to good schools*, *attend good schools*, *end up in good schools*. Another instance of synonymy is the relation between the words *famine* (10) and *hunger*, which may be more specifically described as contextual inclusion, with *famine* being much more contextually restricted.

The word *wallet* (2) used instead of *money* seems to be an example of metonymy. What is interesting is that the word *money* is used twice in the text in the same expressions, *not enough money* (9, 23), so the semantic error in sentence 2 cannot be attributed to the writer's ignorance of the word. Moreover, the word *wallet* is put in inverted commas, which suggests that the use of figurative lan-

guage was intentional; however, it was unanimously identified as an error.

What the judges were not unanimous about was the use of the adjective *sociological* instead of *social* in the phrase **sociological transformation* (14). Surprisingly, two NS judges accepted the word, although *sociological* is typically explained as related to *sociology* and collocates with *theory, research, study*, whereas *social* is related to *society* and does collocate with *transformation*. (In *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary* there are 3 examples of the collocation *social transformation* taken from both British and American written English.)

The remaining 3 errors are more semantically distant from the target expressions. The words *cheaper* (7) and *poorer* are not related, although they may belong to the same semantic field, the common association being the concept of *money*, or specifically *less money*. (Interestingly, the word *poor* is used correctly in sentence 21.) Finally, there are two errors that none of the NS judges managed to reconstruct correctly: *firm* for *brand-name* in **firm clothes* (4) and *pictures* for *examples / role models* in **They don't have a good pictures . . .* (19). In the first case it may still be claimed that the two words *firm* and *brand-name* come from the same semantic field: a brand-name product is a product that is sold under the name of the manufacturer (in the case of clothes, though, it is a company, not a firm). Unluckily, the word *firm* is also an adjective with an unrelated meaning, which must have led the judges to believe that it meant e.g. *durable, good-quality*. In the other error, which does not seem to be a transfer error, the semantic relation between *pictures* and *examples / role models* is very difficult to trace. Of the three NS judges, two attempted some reconstruction: *a good mental picture of themselves, a good self-image* and both missed the point of the phrase. One of the student judges misunderstood it as *good appearance*.

Explanation of Errors

The description of errors has already illustrated one of the criticisms directed at Error Analysis, namely that the taxonomies frequently confuse description with explanation. Even the names of the categories of errors in the Target Modification Taxonomy suggest the origin of the error. In

ambiguous cases, the researcher has to ascribe the error to the category by attempting to understand its origin, e.g. whether it results from the wrong choice (misselection) or from simplification of the target phrase (omission).

Although James does provide a neat taxonomy for error diagnosis with four major categories, which are further broken down into numerous subcategories, he concludes that description with a reminder that errors are ambiguous or compound and "it is unusual to be able to ascribe with confidence a given error to a single cause" (1998: 200). In order to avoid mere speculation in the following attempt at diagnosing the errors in text 1, the discussion of the categories will be selective rather than comprehensive, focusing on the most striking characteristics of the learners' output.

Interlingual Errors: L1 Influence

Transfer from L1 is typically recognized as a major source of errors. Arabski's study (1979) of errors made by Polish EFL learners, for example, showed that it was the major source for all groups of writers, independently of their level of English.

Text 1 has a number of errors which can be classified as interlingual. Nearly all grammatical errors of omission can be explained as resulting both from simplification (or reduction) and from transfer from Polish because the elements that were omitted do not have equivalents in Polish (auxiliary *do*, existential *there*, infinitive marker *to*, articles, preposition *of* for the genitive). Interestingly, in Arabski's study of 4263 errors, the 974 article errors were not ascribed to L1 influence because Polish has no articles. However, this view is criticised by Kellerman as restricted. He emphasizes the high frequency of article errors in Arabski's corpus of texts (the omission of the indefinite article being the most common and persistent error) and claims that the fact that "Polish does not have an article system as we know it may contribute to the high frequency" (1984: 100–1).

So if article errors are seen as interlingual errors for Polish learners, text 1 is noticeably affected by transfer. There are 9 errors of omission (unless 5 of them are interpreted as plural nouns) but, what is particularly striking, there are 11 errors of the addition of the indefinite ar-

ticle, which is the smallest category of article errors in Arabski's study. He also found that while the omission of articles decreased in higher levels, the addition of articles, especially *the*, showed the opposite tendency. So even if the writer of text 1 is seen from this perspective as a more advanced learner, who has problems with the oversuppliance of articles rather than their absence, still the persistence of the indefinite article with plural nouns is intriguing. While the nuances of the English article system might be very difficult to acquire for the Polish learner, the rule that the indefinite article is never used with plural nouns is the least problematic. One cannot even explain this error by misapplication of the rule (the writer's misconception) because the same plural nouns, *children* (2, 4, 7, 8, 18, 21), *houses* (11), *schools* (20), *parents* (3), and two other plural nouns, *teenagers* (3), *organizations* (23), are also used by the writer without any article.

Out of the 20 lexical errors, 7 can be seen as interlingual: 3 calques, 2 collocational errors (discussed above), one classified as confusion of sense relations, **firm clothes* (*firmowe ubrania*) for *brand-name clothes* (4) and a formal lexical error **tendention* (21). The last one is ambiguous because it could be interpreted as an intralingual error of overgeneralization: the learner knows other nouns with the suffix, e.g. *organization* (23), or as an interlingual (transfer) error: the Polish equivalent *tendencja* happens to have the suffix *-cja*, which is typically represented in English as *-tion*.

Another area of errors in text 1, where the influence of the mother tongue can be identified, is misselection in spelling. As has already been mentioned, there are 9 errors resulting from the phonological distinctions which are difficult to perceive for Polish learners (vowels in *bed*, *bad* and *feel*, *fill*).

On the whole, what is striking in text 1 is that while it is undoubtedly affected by L1 influence, it also has errors which seem to result from incomplete transfer, or in other words, which would have been eliminated if the writer had benefited from L1 influence. The lexical distortions, **aclimation* (22), **stereopetite* (24) have already been discussed. The preposition *on* is used instead of three other prepositions (*from*, *in*, *to*) in the phrases **on that's family* (17), **on shoools* (20), **on cities* (22), and these three are also used correctly in the text. Obviously, the Polish influence would have helped (*z takich rodzin, w szkołach, do miasta*).

Intralingual Errors

While it is possible to detect the influence of Polish in the text and ascribe those errors to the category of interlingual errors with some confidence, the intralingual errors are difficult to classify into their subcategories. This is mainly due to the fact that these subcategories rely on identifying some regularities, whereas, as has been already indicated, the errors in text 1 are not systematic. Even if a strong tendency is identified such as the use of the indefinite article with plural nouns, there is also evidence that contradicts it. When verbs are considered, there are 2 cases of using a past form after *don't*: **don't ended* (9) and **don't known* (12) but there are 7 cases of using a correct form after *don't* (3, 4, 6, 14, 18, 19) and one of them is even used with the same verb *know* (14). Generally, the intralingual errors do not seem to result from any particular rules created or misapplied by the learner. Although they may testify to the variability of the learner's interlanguage, a number of the writer's choices seem accidental and arbitrary, as if she had no language awareness and definitely no awareness of the restrictions in its system.

Tracing the errors back to teaching methods, teachers, materials, or pedagogical priorities, i.e. diagnosing them as induced, is even more speculative. If any tentative attempt can be made, it is perhaps the following. Some spelling errors, especially those of misordering (confusing word boundaries), may suggest that developing oral skills took priority over reading and writing, although other spelling errors in the corpus give much more evidence for this. What is, however, most striking in text 1 is the discrepancy between the features of advanced language and error density as well as gravity. Although most of the sentences are short and simple, there are some attempts at syntactic complexity, especially the mixed conditional (20). Several errors in the use of verbs result from using inflected forms rather than simplified, reduced forms. While it has been noticed that the Present Participle *-ing* is oversupplied by beginners because the Present Continuous Tense is introduced earlier in the syllabus and a number of verbs may be first encountered in their inflected forms, the Past Participle of an irregular verb such as *know* is likely to follow its infinitive form in any syllabus, so being familiar with it should typically indicate a higher level of language development. The text has a relatively high figure for advanced lexis, but also a relatively high number

of lexical errors, both formal and semantic. Out of the 23 words (8.9% of the text) classified as advanced lexis, 7 are lexical errors, and 2 of them (*famine* and *rustically*) are errors exactly because they are, as if, “too advanced,” i.e. although they are semantically closely related to their target forms, they are contextually much more restricted. It is also noticeable that being a formal error (adverb instead of an adjective), the word *rustically* becomes even more advanced because in this form it is extremely rare and not even listed in advanced learner's dictionaries (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, *Collins COBUILD Dictionary for Advanced Learners*). It is not even clear if transfer from L1 can be directly blamed for this error. Although the Polish adjective is formally similar to the English adverb (*rustykalny* – *rustically*), it is also very rare and contextually restricted. The collocations used in the text are equally unacceptable in Polish (**rustykalne dzieci / szkoły*). If errors in the learner's output can be seen as a result of developing communicative skills at the expense of accuracy, text 1 is not simply affected by such pedagogical priorities. The writer could have easily communicated the meaning in simpler words (e.g. *children in the country* or *country schools*), which would have been “safer” in terms of accuracy. Her risky lexical choices suggest the intention to display knowledge rather than to avoid possible errors, the strategy she may have been encouraged to develop: she must have been appreciated for using difficult or rare words much more than punished for her inaccuracy.

Evaluation of Errors

Two criteria for error gravity have been selected for this case study: comprehensibility or intelligibility, i.e. “accessibility of the basic, literal meaning” (James 1998: 212) and basicness (Hughes and Lascaratou 1982). Comprehensibility is what NS judges are most concerned with, whereas NNS judges are more influenced by what they perceive as the “basic” rules of the target language, which is typically related to syllabus concerns.

Comprehensibility

Despite the very high number of errors in text 1, all four expert judges were very successful in their reconstructions. Out of the 261 words in the text marred by 110 errors, there were only 4 errors that all 3 NS judges did not understand: **many childrens / with many children*, *wielodzietna* (10), **firm / brand-name* (4), **ended / finish* (9), **pictures / examples*, *role models* (19). Interestingly, these are all lexical errors, the first two directly resulting from L1 transfer. Among these, there is only one (**many childrens family*) that none of all expert judges understood. Although the error is an obvious calque, the Polish judge was simply misled by its apparent similarity to the phrase acceptable in the context, (*many children's family*) and opted for this reconstruction as more readily accessible.

The results in the group of non-expert judges (American undergraduates with no experience of foreign languages) were incomparable, and there were also substantial differences between them related to their grades in college: good students at least attempted to reconstruct nearly all sentences, while a poor student attempted only several reconstructions, and some of them with new errors. However, it is impressive that one of the students did understand the lexical error incomprehensible to all expert NS judges: **ended* (9) was reconstructed as *graduate*. The students misunderstood some errors in a variety of ways but it is striking that what looks like a minor spelling error, **femine / famine* (10) affected 2 students' comprehension in the same way. Their reconstructions of sentence 10 were:

- *Epecially female children.*
- *There are more girls than guys.*

which shows that they were much more influenced by the spelling of the word (similar to *feminine*) than its semantic relation (*famine* – *hunger*) to the context.

All judges (expert and non-expert) were asked if there was any particularly striking quality in the sample of learner English in text 1. Those NS judges who answered this question emphasized that the text was very difficult to understand, and if they pointed to any particularly serious errors, the only criterion that they applied was that of comprehensibility. It was only the Polish judge who found it striking that despite serious er-

rors, there were attempts at more complex language. It also struck him that some of the erroneous sequences could not even be explained as negative transfer from Polish. (This characteristic has been called "incomplete transfer" in this analysis.)

All in all, although text 1 has a very high error density, which may have had a cumulative effect on the judges, the 33 spelling errors and, what is much more interesting, the 57 grammatical errors did not affect the comprehensibility of the text in the case of expert judges. Obviously, it has to be remembered that all errors were reconstructed in the context of the whole text, which to a certain degree is repetitive. The only errors that were incomprehensible were lexical errors, which coincides with McCretton and Rider's (1993) universal hierarchy of errors, where errors in lexis are classified as the most severe.

Basicness

What NNS teachers typically apply as a criterion for error gravity is related to the structure of the syllabus. Experienced L2 teachers working with learners with the same L1 (in this case teachers of English working with Polish learners) would also rely on another criterion, namely whether a particular item generally poses a problem for that group of learners. For example, there may be items that appear very early in the syllabus but are either markedly distant from the Polish equivalent (e.g. existential *there*) or have low frequency (e.g. *worse*).

From this perspective, the error that is very serious in text 1 is that of using the indefinite article with plural nouns, especially because of its frequency (11 occurrences). The rule which it violates appears in the very first lessons in the simplest structures that are drilled with beginners (*This is a book. These are books. I'm a student. We are students. There is a table in the room. There are chairs in the room.*). Besides, as has already been mentioned, this rule concerning the English article system is exceptionally unambiguous and easy to acquire. Another serious problem is the confusion of verb forms. There are 14 errors in which verbs are variously affected (omission, addition, misselection). In three of them the 3rd person singular suffix is added to the plural form of the verb in the Present Simple Tense. Again, the grammatical item itself is introduced early in the syllabus and, if it causes any errors, it is omission rather than

oversuppliance, especially that it is used with only one person and not used with five.

Assessment

On the whole, what is very disturbing from the pedagogical perspective is that the errors in text 1 are not systematic. If one can diagnose the learner's problem as misapplication of a particular rule resulting from ignorance or e.g. overdrilling of a particular structure, one can offer adequate treatment: a better explanation or more practice. The writer of text 1, however, displays a high degree of recklessness in her use of English. She does not seem to be aware that language is a system and that her infringement of its rules cannot possibly go unpunished.

Taking into account writing assessment, text 1 is obviously completely inadequate in terms of the language. It is interesting, however, that the main criterion applied to evaluating errors in writing assessment is that of comprehensibility. As the above analysis has shown, while there is no doubt that text 1 is inadequate due to serious error, it is definitely not totally incomprehensible, at least for expert judges. This can only confirm the challenge involved in writing assessment; no matter how detailed the assessment scale, the criteria become valid only within a specific context.

Appendix 1: Text 1

A worse children

1. Where they comes from?
2. I think that situation polish children is couse by not enough „valler“.
3. Teenagers parents don't enough earn.
4. Their children don't have a firm, originally clothes.
5. They are laughet by another children.
6. They lives in a bed, old houses, where they don't have own room.
7. A reach children – computers children are very diffrent from cheeper friends.
8. They are couragous, not like rustically children – they affraid a new situa-tion.
9. They don't ended a good schools and in the futhure they will be a worse parents, friend with a bed fillings and memory about no enough money for food.
10. Femine is a specially in many childrens family.
11. Somethimes they comes from childrenhouses, becource their parents drinking too much alcohols, and they (parents) often are bit.
12. They always use to agression, becource they don't known how help onself.
13. They are moody.
14. They don't know work or they don't have work for sociological transforma-tion which have place a few years ago.
15. They can't faind their life way.
16. They are lost.
17. On that's family coms „garbedge child“.
18. Children don't have a chance change their life.
19. They don't have a good pictures, so that to many people on streat begging for „only a few“ coins.
20. If they hadn't a problems on shoools they would have been a change.
21. Now is tendention to close a rustically schools what is bed for poor chil-dren.
22. Their are ashamed, they couldn't aclimation on cities.
23. Organizations which could help not have enough money.
24. "A wors children" should try change a stereopetite and it same their life.

Appendix 2: Profile of Errors in Text 1

level modification	SUBSTANCE: SPELLING 33 errors	TEXT 77 errors		
		GRAMMAR 57 errors	LEXIS 20 errors	
			FORMAL 12 errors	SEMANTIC 8 errors
OMISSION 29 spelling: 8 grammar: 21 (14 types)	<p><i>e</i> *diffrent (7) *couragous (8) *onself (12) *coms (17) *uors (24)</p> <p><i>g</i> *agression (12)</p> <p><i>o</i> *to (19)</p> <p><i>c</i> *shools (20)</p>	<p>verbs: auxiliary <i>do</i> (question 1, negative 23) <i>-ed</i> in *couse (2) <i>are</i> in *they affraid (8) Infinitive marker <i>to</i> in *known how help . . . (12) *a chance change (18) *try change (24)</p> <p>articles: <i>the</i> before *situation (2) *(sociological) transformation (14) *streat (19) <i>a</i> before *tendention (21)</p> <p>a or plural suffix: *friend (9) *memory (9) *family (10, 17) *child (17)</p> <p>pronouns: <i>their</i> (6) <i>them</i> (11) existential there (21)</p> <p>prepositions: <i>of</i> (2, 8)</p>		
ADDITION 26 spelling: 10 (6 types)	<p><i>t</i> *enought (2, 3, 9, 23)</p>	<p>a before a plural noun: *a . . . children (title, 7, 24) *a . . . clothes (4)</p>		

level modification	SUBSTANCE: SPELLING 33 errors	TEXT 77 errors		
		GRAMMAR 57 errors	LEXIS 20 errors	
			FORMAL 12 errors	SEMANTIC 8 errors
grammar: 16 (5 types)	<i>h</i> after <i>r</i> <i>*futhure</i> (9) <i>*sometimes</i> (11) <i>r</i> <i>*becourse</i> (11, 12) <i>f</i> <i>*affraid</i> (8) <i>a</i> <i>*faind</i> (15)	<i>*a . . . houses</i> (6) <i>*a . . . schools</i> (9, 21) <i>*a . . . parents</i> (9) <i>*a . . . fillings</i> (9) <i>*a . . . pictures</i> (19) <i>*a . . . problems</i> (20) verbs: <i>-s</i> in <i>*they comes</i> (1, 11) <i>*they lives</i> (6) <i>are</i> in <i>*they (parents) are bit</i> (11) preposition: to <i>*they always use to agression</i> (12)		
MISSELECTION 51 spelling: 15 (12 types) grammar: 17 formal lexical: 11 (11 types) semantic lexical: 8	<i>p/P</i> <i>*polish</i> (2) <i>v/w</i> <i>*vallet</i> (2) <i>o/a</i> <i>*couse</i> (2) <i>*becourse</i> (11, 12) <i>e/a</i> <i>*bed</i> (6, 9, 21) <i>*femine</i> (10) <i>*garbedge</i> (17) <i>ea/i</i> <i>*reach</i> (7) <i>i/ea</i> <i>*bit</i> (11) <i>i/ee</i> <i>*fillings</i> (9) <i>ee/ea</i> <i>*cheeper</i> (7) <i>ea/ee</i> <i>*streat</i> (19)	verbs: <i>*drinking</i> (11) / <i>drink</i> <i>*begging</i> (19) / <i>beg</i> <i>* (don't) known</i> (12) / <i>(don't) know</i> <i>* (don't) ended</i> (9) / <i>won't finish</i> <i>*have</i> (14) / <i>took</i> <i>*couldn't</i> (22) / <i>can</i> prepositions: <i>*about</i> (9) / <i>of</i> <i>*for</i> (14) / <i>because of</i> <i>*on</i> (17) / <i>from</i> <i>*on</i> (20) / <i>in</i> <i>*on</i> (22) / <i>to</i> pronouns: <i>*onself</i> (12) / <i>themselves</i> <i>*that's</i> (17) / <i>such</i> <i>*what</i> (21) / <i>which</i>	derivational suffixes: <i>-ly</i> (adverbs / adjectives) <i>*originally</i> (4) <i>*rustically</i> (8, 21) -tion <i>*tendention</i> (21) <i>*aclimation</i> (22) nouns: <i>*a change</i> (20) / <i>changed</i> <i>*alcohols</i> (11) / <i>alcohol</i> distortions: <i>*aclimation</i> (22) <i>*stereopetite</i> (24) misformation / calque: <i>*many childrens</i> <i>family</i> (10) / <i>wielodzietna rodzina</i>	confusion of sense relations: <i>*famine</i> (10) / <i>hunger</i> <i>*wallet</i> (2) / <i>money</i> <i>*sociological</i> (14) / <i>social</i> <i>*cheaper</i> (7) / <i>poorer</i> <i>*firm</i> (4) / <i>brand-name</i> in <i>*firm clothes</i> <i>*pictures</i> (19) / <i>examples, role models</i> collocational errors: <i>*have place / take place</i> (14) <i>*end school / finish school</i> (9) <i>*rustically children / schools</i> (8, 21)

level modification	SUBSTANCE: SPELLING 33 errors	TEXT 77 errors		
		GRAMMAR 57 errors	LEXIS 20 errors	
			FORMAL 12 errors	SEMANTIC 8 errors
		<i>*their (22) / they</i> <i>*another (5) / other</i> negation: <i>*no (9) / not</i>	<i>*their life way (15) / ich droga życiowa</i> <i>*it same (24) / tak samo</i>	
MISORDERING 6 (9) spelling: 2 grammar: 3 formal lexical: 4 (3 misselection)	<i>*laught (5) / laughed at</i> <i>*a specially (10) / especially</i>	phrase: <i>*enough earn (3) / earn enough</i> <i>*computers children (7) / children with computers</i> sentence: <i>*On that's family coms "garbedge child." (17)</i>	<i>*many childrens family (10) / family with many children</i> <i>*their life way (15) / their way in life</i> <i>*it same (24) / in the same way</i> <i>*childrenhouses (11) / children's homes</i>	
BLEND grammar: 1 (addition)		<i>*they always use to agression (12)</i> blend of: <i>they are used to aggression and they use aggression</i>		

Numbers in brackets indicate sentence numbers.

**becourse* (11, 12) 2 errors (omission, misselection) but counts as 1 error (1 word misspelled); therefore 2 extra errors in modification count.

**aclimation* (22) 2 errors but counted as one (misselection).

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